

Green Briefs: Amy Drayer on sustainability and the Vashon Chamber's mission

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Editor's note: Green Briefs is a regular series of commentaries by eco-leaders on Vashon, presented in The Beachcomber in partnership with The Whole Vashon Project.

Last week, I connected with Amy Drayer, Executive Director of the Vashon Chamber of Commerce to talk about the Chamber's mission and how they wish to partner with businesses and nonprofits in becoming more sustainable. It was inspiring, to say the least! Read on:

"I'm Generation X," said Amy, "meaning that I'm part of that cohort that has one foot planted solidly in the past and the other in the future. I believe that in the Vashon past, folks have sometimes looked at business here and thought it didn't intersect with environmental concerns or sustainability. But today, many of us know that environmental sustainability is core to business, and it is core to our community. For example, we have a lot of agricultural-based businesses on Vashon, which rely on a healthy ecosystem to thrive. We are very clear that we need to create a vital environment for commerce, in order to create opportunities for island businesses and organizations to prosper.

And what creates that vital environment? From the Chamber's perspective, the earth is our home, and the earth gives us all of the resources that we need to live and do business. It is our duty to do the best that we can to steward those resources and steward the earth. That's what makes a sustainable business community.

I believe that it's very difficult for humans to focus sustained attention on something. But actually, I think that Vashon has done this. More than any place I have lived, it has created a climate that places a sustained focus on our relationship to the earth. How? Well, just look at all of the environmental organizations on Vashon, for example. I'm talking about the nearly thirty non-profits, like the Vashon Nature Center, The Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust, Zero Waste Vashon, Vashon Island Growers Association, Vashon-Maury Audubon, the Tool Library, and so many more.

Long ago, before there was something like Earth Week, every day was Earth Day, right? There was the view that if we didn't take care of where and how we were living, we weren't building for a healthy and vital future. But then over time, that standard became lost in the over-commercialization of our culture.

How does this apply to our decision-making on Vashon with an annual event, such as Strawberry Festival? Consumption is really top of mind that weekend. But we are having those conversations now, trying to figure out how to partner with businesses and visitors who want to do business here in such a way that we can really be mindful of our footprint. At Festival, for example, we want to be good about looking at sourcing for merchandise. We are talking with ZeroWaste Vashon, Choose PlasticFree and others to experiment with new ways to make this year a ZeroWaste event. We welcome ideas!

It's an interesting challenge: we represent a great breadth of businesses, with many sole proprietors and home-based businesses, or those that deliver services, such as accountants, rather than material products. How they

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might participate in environmental stewardship is going to be very different from a construction company. There is no one way to do it 'right' in terms of Chamber members. If, however, there are ways that we can assist our membership in understanding how to be stewards or ways that we can promote their stewardship, that would be good. If you are a construction company using the greenest practices, how can we advocate for this? How can we share that as a model for other businesses? The Chamber's job can be to be a liaison, an educator, a promoter, and in such a way that we can create a standard where the health of the environment is top of mind.

What if we could develop a punch list for how we do business here? How can we promote the idea that environmental stewardship is a core value for a business? All we can do every day, is to continue to make the best choices that we can, to tread as lightly as we can, to free up our spirits to participate in a healing and joyful life on an earth that is whole."

Rondi Lightmark is the founder of the Whole Vashon Project (WholeVashonProject.org).

Stay tuned for more articles about Earth Week – we are priming the pump this year! This interview is part of an ongoing series, "Green Briefs," by Vashon's environmental leaders and activities, in partnership with The Whole Vashon Project.

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